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# Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



## Winter 1991

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

### AT ISSUE...VISUALIZING

"Trying to predict the future is usually an exercise in futility. A prediction can be thwarted in so many ways, by events that are totally unpredictable. Yet somehow I have the feeling that visualizing now the gardens of tomorrow is not a difficult thing to do. We know that our society is already locked into a process of rapid change, and we also know the general nature of that "lock" and can easily imagine what it will require us to do.

Population increases continue, and escalating food costs and possible shortages are in the offing-partly because both California and Florida, major sources of winter produce, are losing farmland to housing and other development at a rapid rate. Those states will someday cease being able to send food to people in the rest of the country. The price of commercial food also will be driven up by the higher cost of chemicals. Nitrogen fertilizer production is heavily dependent on the use of natural gas, a fuel which is likely to experience dramatic cost increases. Similar price hikes will hit phosphorus and potash, which are important fertilizers.

As a result of these pressures and changes, there will be more gardens in the future, for the time is coming when once again we'll have to garden to get the food we need, just as our great-grandparents did. But new intensive, labor-saving methods will make that task much easier. And I believe there will be a continuous flow of new plants, techniques, and ideas that will make gardening far more productive and rewarding in years to come.

The highly productive home gardens of tomorrow will, I think, be the sprouts from which many new small farms will grow. The small-scale farmers of the future can hardly learn their craft in the land-grant colleges, which preach bigness in almost every way. These new farmers will start as gardeners and grow from there. I think that we will see the size of gardens increase, so that the distinction between a large garden and a small farm will become blurred.

The new wave of small farms will fill in the chinks of land made available as some of the old-style farmers are driven out of business by ever-bigger farming conglomerates. I think there is room now for many more small farms of the future.

There need not be a limit to our tenure. We can learn to live happily, producing all the food and other goods we need, without wasting the resources that are going to be needed by future generations. There, in the concept of the creation of a sustainable way of life, is our next frontier."

(Robert Rodale died in an auto accident in Moscow, Russia, September 20, 1990. The above excerpt was taken from his book, *Our Next Frontier*, published in 1981 by Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA.)

### 1990 YEARBOOK OF AGRICULTURE

"Americans in Agriculture" is the title of the 1990 Yearbook of Agriculture recently released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Some 21 million Americans work in American agriculture, and millions more teach and study the subject. The 1990 Yearbook tells their stories in 65 chapters that are filled with facts, figures and photographs depicting how diverse U.S. agriculture really is. The book should be of special interest to young people and others looking at various jobs and careers in U.S. agriculture.

Abraham Lincoln called USDA "the People's Department," and it still is. The 1990 Yearbook presents an excellent slice of what America's agriculture is all about.

Each member of Congress has limited free copies of the yearbook for public distribution. Copies also are available for \$10 from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20402. In addition, the yearbook will be sold at Government bookstores in many cities. Be sure to give stock no. 001-000-04559-8 when ordering.

USDA has no copies for sale or distribution.

### TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

*Specialty Spuds* - Free, if you send a "self addressed stamped envelope," the Potato Letter lists a variety of rare and unusual seed potatoes for sale. Contact: Susan Mongold, HCR 15, Dyer, NV 89010; no telephone.

*Expensive* - "In terms of 1989 dollars, if pesticide use were eliminated, consumers would spend \$228 more per household annually; if the ban were extended to include inorganic nitrogen fertilizer, the expenditure would increase to \$428. For the middle-income consumers, this would amount to a 12-percent increase in the consumer's weekly food bill...Knutson & Associates." (The Produce News, July 14, 1990, p. 14A)

**TIP** - To help condition livestock, put the feed on one end of the paddock and the water on the opposite end so the animals have to walk between the two.

*Canada* - Western Biological offers spawn and supplies to growers of shiitake and other types of mushrooms. Their 1990 catalogue with 15 pages of detailed cultivation information costs \$2. Contact: William Chalmers, Western Biological LTD., P.O. Box 283, Aldergrove, B.C., Canada VOX 1AO; telephone 604-856-3339.

*Low-Sugar* - By mixing water, nonfat dry milk, cream, and other ingredients, chocolate and vanilla shakes containing only 6 percent sugar are possible. A typical milkshake has 10 to 12 percent sugar. Contact: Virginia Holsinger, USDA-ARS, Eastern Regional Research Center, Philadelphia, PA 19118; telephone 215-233-6703.

*Refundable* - The Necessary Trading Company specializes in organic fertilizers and pesticides, and their 1991-92 catalog is available for \$2, refundable with the first order. Contact: Nina Davis, Necessary Trading Co., 693 Salem Avenue, New Castle, VA 24127; telephone 703-864-5103 or 1-800-447-5354.

*Factsheet* - Beekeeping is the latest in the series "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative" from the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. Contact: Bud Kerr, USDA-CSRS, OSSA, Suite 342, Washington, DC 20250-2200; telephone 202-401-4640, Fax 202-401-5179.

*Steam and Gas* - Available in February, the 1991 Steam and Gas Directory provides information on tractor shows, threshing bees, and swap meets. Cost: \$5. Contact: Judy Sander, Stemgas Publishing Co., Box 328, Lancaster, PA 17603; telephone 717-392-0733.

*Biodegradeable* - If you would like information and a sample of paper grass 30- or 50-gallon bags, contact: Barbara Adcock, International Paper, 2119 Adams Avenue, Camden, AR 71701; telephone 1-800-321-0293.

*Farm-Raised Seafood* - For a copy of the directory or information on Maryland farm-raised seafood, contact: Brad Powers, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture Office, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401; telephone 301-841-5724.

**TIP** - Mulch soil to conserve moisture and control weeds.

*Change* - "Over a 20-year period, beef consumption dropped almost 7 percent. But chicken gained almost 72 percent; turkey, 80 percent; and fish and shellfish, more than 38 percent." (The Baltimore Sun, August 29, 1990, p. 11G).

**TIP** - Now is the time to clean the dirt off of all garden hand tools, sharpen if needed, and coat with a mixture of sand and old crankcase oil to prevent rusting.

*Eat more* - On September 6, Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis W. Sullivan released Healthy People 2000, a report identifying national health objectives for the 1990's. Adults are encouraged to eat at least 5 servings of fresh produce a day. Contact: Ellen Haas, Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, 1001 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington, DC 20036; telephone 202-659-5930.

*Compare* - The 1990 U.S. Census found that only 23 percent of Americans live on farms or in small towns, down nearly one half from 44 percent in 1950. However, the trend is even more stark in Europe. In the six original nations of the European Community (France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg), the farming population plummeted from 15.2 million in 1960 to 5.2 million in 1987.

**Question** - Can you name the two perennial vegetables? Answer is somewhere in this newsletter.

**TIP** - Be sure to clean all purchased used farm equipment of seeds before using.

*Jujube* - This fruit tree (chinese date) requires little if any maintenance and is decorative. For a back copy of the Jujube Newsletter, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to: Halfred Wertz, 28 DeWalt Drive, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-1723; telephone 717-697-0419.

*Ashes* - Wood ashes from your fireplace or woodstove contain potash (potassium) and other minerals which you can add to a compost pile or spread over the entire garden, especially around trees.

**Answer** - Asparagus and Rhubarb.

*Horticulture* - Titles and the costs of some excellent 1990 Illinois Horticulture Proceedings are the following:

- Herb Convention @ \$10
- Specialty Growers Convention @ \$15
- Strawberry and Small Fruit Schools @ \$11

Make checks payable to the University of Illinois. Contact: J.W. Courtney, University of Illinois, Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, Simpson, IL 62985; telephone 618-695-2444.

*Asparagus* - The 1990 and previous ('87,'88,'89) issue of proceedings of Illinois Asparagus Schools are available for \$5 each. Contact: Carl J. Cantaluppi (check payable to Rock Island County Extension Service), 1188 John Deere Road, East Moline, IL 61244; telephone 309-796-0512.

*Carolina* - Peanuts, pickles, cookies, and Christmas trees are featured in the North Carolina Gift Catalog. Costs \$1, make check payable to N.C. Agricultural Promotions. Contact: Teresa Hamby, Gift Catalog, P.O. Box 27647, Raleigh, NC 27611; telephone 919-733-7887.

**TIP** - Never be in a hurry about anything to do with your tractor. Always, safety first!

**Disabled** - A free newsletter *Breaking New Ground* is now available for physically disabled farmers, as are resource materials and additional information. Contact: Bill Field, Department of Agriculture Engineering, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907; telephone 317-494-5088.

**TIP** - If plants are mature, remove weeds from field in early morning when moisture is present to prevent excessive seed shattering.

**Farmer-To-Farmer** - Are you interested in hosting on your farm an Egyptian farmer for 4 weeks? The Agricultural Cooperative Development International (ACDI) will provide each farm family with \$20 a day to help cover the cost of hosting a visitor. Contact: Linda Schmid, ACDI, 50 F Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, DC 20001; telephone 202-638-4661, Fax 202-626-8726.

**Research** - The largest and most diverse Agricultural Research Service (ARS) installation is the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, which covers more than 7,000 acres near Washington, DC. Some 2,000 USDA employees work at the Center in research laboratories, greenhouses, barns, poultry houses, shops, and offices. Contact: Steve Berberich, USDA-ARS, National Visitor Center, Bldg. 302 BARC-E, Beltsville, MD 20705; telephone 301-344-2403.

**TIP** - Start a compost pile.

## TWO GOOD SOURCES

### UCSFP

The purpose of the University of California Small Farm Program (UCSFP) is to benefit small farmers and marketers, their clientele, and the natural and renewable resources they depend upon. The UCSFP is part of Cooperative Extension and consists of five full-time farm advisors, about another 40 farm advisors who have partial appointments in small farms or consider themselves to be small farm advisors, and some other specialists who work on small farm issues. The Small Farm Center is the nucleus of the UCSFP and is headquartered at UC Davis.

Currently, priorities for the UCSFP address issues common to most small-scale farmers and marketers. On a statewide basis, the highest priorities are specialty crop production, direct marketing, organic and sustainable agriculture, entry-level farming, and ethnic farmers. Land use and other rural-urban interface issues are expected to become increasingly important.

For more information about the UCSFP contact: Claudia Myers, Small Farm Center, University of California, Davis, CA 95616; telephone 916-757-8910.

**Send** - Topics, technologies, and calendar of events (yours) to the Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA); telephone 202-401-4640. Dialcom-AGS3037 H. Kerr or Fax 202-401-5179

### ATTRA

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), a nation-wide program offering free information about sustainable agriculture to American farmers, is now being funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior. ATTRA is a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), and was formerly funded by the USDA.

Direct your question about sustainable agriculture to Jim Lukens, ATTRA, P.O. Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR 72702; telephone 1-800-346-9140.

## WORTH REPEATING

- never refuel equipment when engines are hot or running,
- no smoking in buildings or near flammable materials,
- equip all major buildings with grounded lightning rods,
- be sure crops are properly dried before storage and have adequate ventilation,
- keep fire extinguishers handy and in good condition,
- wear your seatbelt if the tractor has a Roll Over Protection Shield,
- slow down when turning, crossing slopes, and riding on rough, slick, or muddy surfaces,
- do not permit anyone else to ride with you,
- hitch attachments only to the drawbar and hitch points recommended by tractor manufacturers,
- when tractor is stopped, set the brakes securely and use park lock, if its available, and
- for safety's sake use COMMON SENSE.

## CONNER SAYS

Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture, Doyle Conner in discussing the current Middle East situation believes that its negative impact on American agriculture is being over looked. The reason: "Too many Americans, are too far removed from their agricultural roots."

We don't give enough thought to where our food originates, and many don't care - as long as our retail stores are well-stocked. We forget that agriculture is an essential resource in our economy...increasingly it seems agriculture is coming under fire from critics on the use of synthetic chemicals; on possible environmental degradation; on quantity of water used; on treatment of animals in food production---you have read and heard all of this in the media."

But, he noted, "These outcries are nothing compared to what you would hear if our nation should somehow become dependent on other nations for our food supply as a result of misguided regulatory and trade policies. U.S. agriculture must remain strong." (Nancy Hardy, Florida Citrus, The Produce News, September 15, 1990, p. 28)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**January 22-24, 1991** - New York State Direct Marketing Conference, Holiday Inn, Binghamton, NY. Contact: Frank Wiles, Cooperative Extension, 56 Main Street, Owego, NY 13827-1588; telephone 607-687-4020.

**January 22-24, 1991** - Illinois Specialty Growers Convention and Trade Show, Prairie Capitol Convention Center, Springfield, IL. Contact: Bill Courter, Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, Route 1, Simpson, IL 62985; telephone 618-695-2444.

**February 7-9, 1991** - Pacific Northwest Farm Direct Marketing Conference, Holiday Inn, Wilsonville, OR. Contact: Larry Burt, Agricultural and Research Economics, Ballard Extension Hall 213, Corvallis, OR 97331-3601; telephone 503-737-1436.

**February 10-13, 1991** - North American Strawberry Growers Meeting, St. Petersburg Hilton and Tower, St. Petersburg, FL. Contact: R.C. Funt, NASG, P.O. Box 20268, Columbus, OH 43220; telephone 614-292-8327, Fax 614-459-5237.

**February 11, 1991** - Illinois Asparagus School will be held at the Deere and Co, Administrative Center, John Deere Road (Route 5), Moline, IL. Contact: Carl Cantaluppi, 1188 John Deere Road, East Moline, IL 61244; telephone 309-796-0512.

**February 11-13, 1991** - 1991 New York State Vegetable Conference, Sheraton Inn, Syracuse (Liverpool), NY. Contact: Jean Warholic, NYS Vegetable Conference, P.O. Box 356, Ithaca, NY 14851-0356; telephone 607-539-7648.

**February 13-15, 1991** - "Rural Planning and Development: Visions of the 21st Century," Hilton Inn Gateway, Orlando, FL. Contact: Yvonne Audirac, Dept. of Urban and Regional Planning, 430 ARCH, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611; telephone 904-392-3258; Fax 904-392-7266.

**February 13-15, 1991** - North American Bramble Growers Association, Annual Meeting, St. Petersburg Hilton and Tower, St. Petersburg, FL. Contact: Don Adler, P.O. Box 9963, Daytona Beach, FL 32120; telephone 904-756-3548.

**February 18-20, 1991** - Conference, Revitalizing Rural America: New Strategies for the Nineties, Georgia Center for Continuing Education, Athens, GA. Contact: Norma Reed, Georgia Center, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602; telephone 404-542-2241.

*(Mention of commercial enterprises or brand names does not constitute endorsement or imply preference by the U.S. Department of Agriculture)*

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